

# Frontline



**Jan Richards**

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## Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

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Late in the afternoon on most Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays you'll find me wandering through the leash free area known as Bloomfield Park in the company of my friend Anne, her Irish Terrier Bobbie, and my gorgeous black Labrador Holiday (as mentioned in previous dispatches). In the hour it takes us to meander from start to finish our conversation ranges widely over every topic known to modern woman depending on our mood, the week we've had, and what we watched on TV last night.

Last weekend our conversation took a reflective turn and given ALIA's prominence in my life in the past 18 months it was a no-brainer that it should be a topic for discussion. However Anne took me by surprise when she asked, "are you glad you did it?" Luckily we were crossing what we think of as the Billy Goats Gruff Bridge at the time and so I knew I wouldn't have to come up with a response until we hit the safety of the meadow. By way of explanation there are no Billy Goats in evidence! Rather it's a particularly rank section of the creek which naturally our canine charges adore and so all focus is on moving swiftly through the area with no distractions.

So am I glad I did it? The answer is a resounding yes. It has given me the opportunity to meet with colleagues from all sectors across the country and work with them on issues which are important to them and their future. Along the way I've learned so much. It's very easy to get stuck in your own little niche and while I openly admit that public libraries have been a focus for me (they were part of my election platform), becoming engaged in other areas and having that big picture view has been a real highlight.

It's also been a priority for me to develop the Association. I came to libraries straight from school and for me ALIA (or the Library Association of Australia as it was then called) was a lifeline, providing me with professional contact through publications and professional development opportunities – the Registration examination, conferences, and seminars. Being a member helped to overcome the isolation I felt at being the sole "trainee" in a country library. As I moved to larger centres, I was able to be involved in active regional groups that gave me the chance to network with, and learn from, colleagues working in other sectors. I still value and rely on many of these relationships and friendships.

ALIA has changed since I joined in the 1970s. The range of services it offers has vastly increased and these are delivered in ways we would not have dreamed of in pre-PC days. Similarly the diversity of issues the Association concerns itself with reflects the complexity of modern life.

If we are to remain relevant, associations, like our profession and our industry, need to constantly assess what we're doing. We can't afford to be stagnant. And so while ALIA surveyed its members in 2008 and will survey non-members in the next 6 months, the Board has also been scanning the environment as part of our planning processes to identify the challenges which lay ahead. Similarly our colleagues at CILIP in the UK are undertaking a conversation with members to identify what the Knowledge and

Information domain will look like in 2020, how a professional association fits into this picture, and how members will engage with this professional association. It will be interesting to view the results.

As a society we increasingly seem to be developing a self-service mentality where, often with the aid of technology, we think we can do it better ourselves. That's fine when everything's going well but when there's a hiccup where do we turn? My friend Robert's email signature contains the warning "Without a travel agent, you are on your own" (no prizes for guessing what business he's in!). So it is with Library Associations; they are the safety net that ensures our professional future. Certainly there are some tasks we can do ourselves but do we have the time or the real expertise and what happens when things begin to fall through the cracks? If a significant number opts for the self-service model the association begins to disintegrate until there is a realisation that we need the strength of numbers and collaboration and cooperation, and so we start all over again re-inventing the wheel.

We all know about the somebody as in 'somebody should', but who is that person? Unless we're prepared to support our Association and be active participants we'll be bowling alone.

This is my final Frontline as ALIA President. That my colleagues at Central West Libraries, friends, and family have featured frequently over the past year is not without reason. Without their unwavering encouragement my term on the Board would not have been possible. Similarly the support of the ALIA National Office team, Local Liaison and special project officers, and fellow Board Members has been instrumental in me being able to 'get on with the job'. To you all my heartfelt thanks.

While this is my last Frontline I won't be disappearing from ALIA, just quietly taking a backseat. To our incoming President Graham Black and new and continuing Board members, every best wishes for the year ahead. And to you, the members who make this such a great Association, thank you for being there to share my journey.

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